

MEDICINE

Misuse of Tranquilizers

American Psychiatric Association warns public and doctors about new drugs. Study shows placebos and pills have same effect before surgery.

► AN EMPHATIC two-way warning about the new tranquilizing drugs has been issued by the American Psychiatric Association.

1. The public and doctors were warned that "casual" use of these drugs to relieve every day tensions is "medically unsound and constitutes a public danger."

2. Physicians were warned to beware of "subtle pressures" from the public and pharmaceutical houses.

Normal competition among drug houses, the official statement points out, should not involve physicians in public relations enterprises directed toward premature announcement of "successful use" of particular products.

Psychiatrists are "enthusiastic" about these drugs for the treatment of psychiatric disorders, the warning statement says, but they are "concerned" about the apparently widespread use of them by the public for the relief of common anxiety, emotional upsets, nervousness and every day tensions.

The evidence is that these drugs are effective in making disturbed patients in mental hospitals more readily accessible to treatment. This has made possible impressive advances in mental hospital treatment programs and increased discharge rates.

In 1956, it is reported, 35,000,000 prescriptions for the drugs will be written. Of 10 compounds most frequently prescribed by doctors in 1955, three were tranquilizers.

The drugs have not been used long enough to determine the full range, duration and medical significance of their side effects, it is pointed out in the association's statement to its members.

Use of these drugs, the statement says, is no more to be encouraged than use of any other drugs except where medical diagnosis shows a drug is needed to maintain the life and functioning of a person.

The prescribing of the tranquilizing drugs for emotional illnesses carries with it an obligation for continuing appraisal and supervision by physicians fully aware of the psychiatric symptoms involved and the potentials of their course of development, alteration or remission.

Comprehensive research programs to evaluate the drugs, such as the one launched by the Veterans Administration, should be encouraged.

Psychiatrists are warned, however, to beware of "subtle pressures that combine to foster public misunderstanding and the misuse of the drugs."

By coincidence, reinforcement of part of the warning came in a report from Chicago. Blank placebo pills, looking just like pills of the tranquilizing drug, reserpine, had the same effect as reserpine in relieving anxiety

of patients about to undergo surgical operations, Northwestern University School of Medicine, Chicago, doctors found.

In other words, for this particular anxiety, the tranquilizing drug is not needed.

More effective than pills in relieving the patients' anxiety before operations, the Northwestern group said, is the patients' confidence in the hospital and the doctor.

This report, from a study by Drs. Roy M. Whitman, Morris A. Lipton and Eva Kavan, is presented in the *Quarterly Bulletin* of Northwestern University Medical School.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Food and Drug Has Fiftieth Anniversary

► RE-TOOLING for the atomic age in medicines, foods and probably even cosmetics is one of the big jobs in the next 50 years for the U. S. Food and Drug Administration and the Meat Inspection Branch, U. S. Department of Agriculture, now celebrating their first 50 years of existence.

We may move quickly from the frozen

foods now in our supermarkets and corner grocery stores to foods preserved by atomic radiation. Our doctors today are already prescribing radioactive cocktails for some patients in hospitals and using radioactive tracer chemicals for diagnostic tests on others.

If we are to have the benefits of these and other atomic age developments without hazard, the guardians of our health through pure and safe foods, drugs and cosmetics must have our support.

This year we celebrate the passage 50 years ago of the first Federal pure Food and Drugs Act and the Meat Inspection Act, which have been called the "most important peacetime legislation in U. S. history." The next 50 years will call for increased research on how to use safely the life-saving advances other research is now bringing and will continue to bring.

We must be ready to supply funds for the one kind of research as we already are doing for the other kind. We must make careers in protection of foods, drugs and cosmetics inviting to boys and girls now in high schools and colleges so that we shall have a big enough army to give us this peacetime health protection in the atomic age.

When you go to buy food for the family today, or stop at the drug store for medicine, face powder or after-shave lotion, let the errand remind you to get acquainted with your state and local food and drug laws and their enforcement. The continued health of you and your family may depend on them.

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HURRICANE SHIP—To search out the birthplace of hurricanes in the South Atlantic, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution has commissioned the research vessel, *Crawford*, shown here in the foreground. (See SNL, June 9, p. 362.) In the background are the research vessels, *Atlantis* and *Caryn*. The *R. V. Bear* is barely visible through the rigging.